

The Spirit of Adoption 3. Rom 8:12-18; Gal 4:1-7; Eph 1:3-6

Audio: <https://www.daleappleby.net/index.php/mp3-sermons/51-recent-sermons/1026-the-spirit-of-adoption-3>

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vER0lx4J8zw>

Introduction

I started my sermon last week with a profound statement of how the Lord works in our lives, “What the cross cleanses the Spirit fills.” (Roy Hession). Having taught about the taking away of judgement in the cross, I now want to focus on the power of the Spirit in adoption. It follows that if the cleansing from sin is total, then being filled with the Spirit of adoption should likewise be complete. To equate the fulness of the Spirit (Eph 5:18) with all that follows it, prophecy (Acts 2:4, 11, 14ff; 19:6), evangelism (Acts 2:14ff; 4:8, 29ff), praise and tongues-speaking (Acts 10:44-46; Eph 5:18-19) and acts of power (Acts 13:9-11), would be a mistake. Inspired speech might be a clear New Testament evidence of being filled with the Spirit, but it is *not the substance* of the fullness of the Spirit. The substance of the fullness of the Spirit, that which fills the Spirit himself, is surely the saving life of Christ. It was through the Spirit that the Word became incarnate, ministered in power, cast out demons, submitted himself to the Father’s will in Gethsemane, offered himself as the perfect sacrifice on the cross and was subsequently raised from the dead (Matt 12:28; Luke 1:35; 4:14; Mark 14:36; Heb 9:14; Rom 8:11). The Holy Spirit, likewise called “the Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9), is super-saturated with the life of Jesus (cf. Acts 16:7). To be filled with the Spirit is to share in Spirit’s total understanding of Jesus, his intimate covenant knowledge of Christ (cf. John 17:3), it is to share through the Spirit in the Son’s understanding of himself in the Father’s love. ⁹This explains why in the New Testament almost everything that is said about Jesus is also said of the Spirit (<http://cross-connect.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Holy-Spirit.pdf> pp.15-17)⁰. To receive the Spirit is to be united to the fulness of the life of Christ. This is the most dynamic thing that could ever happen to a human being (cf. Acts 1:1). It is to be “fully alive” (Cf. Irenaeus). This dynamism is especially concentrated in the adoption of sonship.

The Spirit of Adoption

When Paul says in Romans and Galatians that “God has sent the Spirit of adoption/his Son into our hearts crying ‘Abba! Father!’ he uses the language of Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane (Mark 14:36). We should understand this, not as an echo or imitation of Christ’s intercessory experience but an actual sharing in it through the Spirit. In Pauline language it is part of “the fellowship of his (Christ’s) sufferings” and “filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” (Phil 3:10; Col 1:24). It’s not simply that there’s a correspondence between the way the Son of God and the Christian know God intimately as Father, but a shared pathos of this revelation-knowledge in the Spirit.

The word used in Paul’s letters, “cry” (*kradzo*), “Abba! Father!” (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6) and the Gospel description of Jesus’ dereliction, “at the ninth hour Jesus cried (*kradzo*) with a loud voice, “Why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34), use the same Greek word. A word which has a background in the old covenant (Ex 22:22; Judges 3:9 etc; Ps 22:5) when in

times of emergency those *without strength or resources turned their whole hearts to God* as their only hope of deliverance. The crying out of the adopted children of God in the power and inspiration of the Spirit must in real measure share in the depths of the cry of the cross. There is something immensely profound about this Spirit-filled utterance.

The intensity of this relationship with God as Father is well summed up by Luther in his commentary on Galatians. Contrary to feel-good expositions of the meaning of Abba! Father! as “Daddy”, Luther is in tune with the context of Paul’s teaching in Romans 8 (especially verses 18-23) about cosmic labour pains/groaning. It’s a lengthy quote but once heard you will understand why I am using it:

“in this trial a man feels the power of sin, the weakness of the flesh, and his doubt; he feels the fiery darts of the devil (Eph. 6:16), the terrors of death, and the wrath and judgment of God. All these things issue powerful and horrible cries against us, so that there appears to be nothing left for us except despair and eternal death.

But in the midst of these terrors of the Law, thunderclaps of sin, tremors of death, and roarings of the devil, Paul says, the Holy Spirit begins to cry in our heart: ‘Abba! Father!’ And His cry vastly exceeds, and breaks through, the powerful and horrible cries of the Law, sin, death, and the devil. It penetrates the clouds and heaven, and it reaches all the way to the ears of God....Should we not rather remember, then, that Paul says that the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness and cries: “Abba! Father!”? That is, He emits what seems to us to be some sort of sob and sigh of the heart; but in the sight of God this is a loud cry and a sigh too deep for words. In every temptation and weakness, therefore, just cling to Christ and sigh! He gives you the Holy Spirit, who cries: “Abba! Father!” Then the Father says: “*I do not hear anything in the whole world except this single sigh, which is such a loud cry in My ears that it fills heaven and earth and drowns out all the cries of everything else.*”

The relational and spiritual depth of adoption is indescribably wonderful. We must say that as God was limitlessly *constrained in love to be Father* to the praying suffering humanity of the Son in Gethsemane and to deliver him from death by resurrection (Heb 5:7), so he is likewise moved to be our *Abba*. And as such he will deliver us and will most certainly raise us from the dead (Ps 34:19; 1 Cor 6:14). Such Spirit-inspired utterance, and there is nothing more prophetic than the cry, “Abba! Father!”, irresistibly moves the heart of God. That’s how it was always planned to be (Eph 1:4-6; 2 Tim 1:9).

As the Father can only will and act in his Son, then it would be fair to say that the summit of our union with Christ is our adoption by the power of the Spirit to the glory of God. Adoption is nothing less than *immersion in the life of the Trinity as it has come to exist in the life story of Jesus*. One outstanding dimension of what this means and how it becomes real for us is inheritance.

Inheritance

Adoption to sonship without inheritance is inconceivable. “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” (Rom 8:16-17). Many commentators are so bold as to say that “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17) means *inheriting God himself*. Cranfield says it is

“sharing...in the perfect and imperishable glory of His own life” cf. Rev 21:7. As sons we are sure heirs of God in the tradition of Abraham and his “seed”, Jesus (Gal. 3:26, 29; 4:7). Believers will share with Christ in the fulness of his Father’s glory (Matt 13:43), we will rule upon the earth forever (Rev. 5:10; 20:6; 22:5) manifesting a salvation that will somehow affect/fill the whole cosmos (Rom.8:19-21). Such a dynamic inheritance is the eternal consummation of our sonship. The everlasting future laid up for us is the portion of the true people of God (Eph. 1:14, 18; 5:5; Col. 3:24; cf. 1Cor. 15:50; Tit 3:7). If it is true, as Paul says to the Corinthians, “all things are yours” (1 Cor 3:21), why are so many Christians possessed by the things of this world? It must be that we are grieving the Spirit of adoption. Whilst I believe in a revival characterised by powerful preaching, signs and wonders, I believe even more that we need a mature move of God characterised by an outpouring of the Spirit of adoption. Let me conclude this series with a personal experience.

Conclusion

About 30 years ago, I had an unusual but memorable experience which speaks powerfully about the Father who has adopted us. I was at a gym watching one of our daughters and noticed an Indigenous infant nearby. Instantly, an enormous softness came over my heart, so much so that when I went home, I asked Donna if she had ever thought about adopting an aboriginal child. Within a few days we were asked by the mother of a child with an Indigenous father whether we would adopt their daughter. (We did become her guardians for several years.) If I as a fallen person could feel such *tremendous tenderness of spirit*, surely there is no hardness in the heart of the Father towards us. Only when our hearts have been “hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” (Heb 3:13) can we conceive of the heavenly Father as someone quick to anger and slow to forgive (Ex 34:6; Ps 103:8-14). The Spirit is sent into our hearts in union with Christ crying “Abba! Father!” as a testimony that these sentiments are completely false. Most of us need a much fuller revelation of the enormity of our salvation of which adoption speaks.

Just as the Sonship of Jesus speaks of his complete identity before the Father so our adoption embraces all of who we are in Christ. Sonship is more than a doctrine or a wonderful subjective experience, in it the Spirit testifies that we are the first fruits (Rom 8:23) of the transformation of “*all things*”. Whilst the whole creation is waiting for the full manifestation of “the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom 8:21) this wonderful freedom is something in which we can abide now. While in a time of crisis like the current COVID 19 pandemic those whom scripture calls the “children of wrath” have no assured inheritance beyond this uncertain world, as the “children of light” (Eph 5:8; 1 Thess 5:5) we can by our life witness to Jesus point to a Father who has prepared for us another world which will never perish (Luke 12:33) and where we will enjoy his pleasure forever (Luke 12:32; Eph 1:5, 9).